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Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

Second session
Maastricht, the Netherlands, 3 and 4 July 2014
Item 5 (b) of the provisional agenda
Programme of work and operation of the Protocol: strategic plan for 2015–2020

Draft decision II/2 on the strategic plan for 2015–2020 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers

Summary

By its decision I/6, the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers requested the Working Group of the Parties to consider the need for a long-term strategic plan for the Protocol and, if deemed necessary, to take steps to prepare such a plan for possible adoption by the Meeting of the Parties, and to explore potential synergies between such a long-term strategic plan and the strategic plan for the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decision I/6, para. 9).[1] In accordance with that mandate, at its second meeting (Geneva, 20–21 November 2012), the Working Group of the Parties requested the Bureau to prepare a draft decision on a strategic plan for 2015–2020 for the Protocol (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2012/2, para. 36 (d) (ii)).[2]

At its fourth meeting (Geneva, 21 November 2012), the Bureau decided to circulate the draft decision on the strategic plan to national focal points and stakeholders for

[1] Available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/mopp1.html.
[2] Available from http://www.unece.org/index.php?id=28225

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comments.[3] The Bureau thereafter revised the draft decision in the light of the comments received and finalized the document at its fifth meeting (Madrid, 2–3 July 2013) before submitting it to the Working Group of the Parties.

The draft decision forwarded by the Bureau (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2013/8) was considered by the Working Group at its third meeting (Geneva, 20–21 November 2013). The Working Group approved the draft decision, as amended at the meeting (ECE/MP.PRTR/WG.1/2013/8/CRP.1), and requested the secretariat to submit it to the Meeting of the Parties at its second session for adoption.

The present document, containing the draft decision on the strategic plan for 2015–2020 for the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, has been prepared in accordance with the following approach. The introduction, vision and mission were drafted in the light of the Communication Strategy (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.2) and the preamble of the Protocol. A separate section was introduced to clarify the roles and responsibilities of the various actors, namely the Parties, stakeholders and the secretariat. The proposed strategic plan addresses three focal areas respectively: implementation of the Protocol by each Party; lifting barriers to ratification and expansion beyond the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe region; and development of the Protocol. To facilitate reading, focal areas, strategic goals, objectives, implementing partners and indicators of progress and targets were merged into one "Framework for Implementation" table.

[3] See the report on the fourth meeting of the Bureau, para. 6, available from http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr-bureau.html

The Meeting of the Parties,

Recalling the preamble of the Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers, which affirms the wish of the Parties to provide a mechanism contributing to the ability of every person of present and future generations to live in an environment adequate to his or her health and well-being, by ensuring the development of publicly accessible environmental information systems,

Recalling decision I/6 adopted by the Protocol's Meeting of the Parties at its first session (Geneva, 20–22 April 2010), mandating the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol to consider the need for developing a strategic plan and to take steps to prepare a draft for eventual adoption by the Meeting of the Parties,

1. *Adopts* the strategic plan for 2015–2020 set out in the annex to this decision;

2. *Agrees* that the plan will guide the implementation and further development of the Protocol up until the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties.

Annex

Draft strategic plan for 2015–2020

I. Introduction

1. The Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers (Protocol on PRTRs) to the Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) is the first legally binding international instrument on pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTRs). Adopted in 2003, it entered into force in 2009 and has been ratified by 32 Parties so far. It is open for accession by any United Nations Member State, including those outside the un Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region. The objective of the Protocol on PRTRs is to enhance public access to information through the establishment of coherent, nationwide PRTRs.

2. By establishing publicly accessible national PRTRs and requiring companies to produce annual reports on their releases and transfers of specified pollutants or transfers of waste, the Protocol on PRTRs aims to contribute to the prevention and reduction of pollution of the environment, thereby contributing to sustainable development and the promotion of green economies.

3. According to its mandate from the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol to consider the need for developing a strategic plan, and to take steps to prepare a draft for eventual adoption by the Meeting of the Parties (ECE/MP.PRTR/2010/2/Add.1, decisions I/6, para. 9), at its first session the Working Group of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 28–29 November 2011) considered the challenges faced by many countries in ratifying, acceding to or implementing the Protocol; medium- to long-term new development areas of the Protocol; and opportunities to further cooperate and look for synergies with other organizations and multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs), since they share similar objectives as regards protection of the environment and access to information.

4. As a result, the Working Group of the Parties decided to develop a strategic plan for the Protocol for 2015–2020 with a view to its submission to the Meeting of the Parties for consideration and adoption at its second session in 2014.

II. Vision and mission

5. Our long-term vision is:[a]

(a) To contribute towards ensuring the right of every person of present and future generations to a healthy community through easy, user-friendly and free publicly accessible information about pollution of the environment by means of PRTRs;

(b) To contribute to the prevention and reduction of pollution of the environment by increasing transparency and encouraging improvements in environmental performance by industrial operators in order to move towards sustainable and environmentally sound development.

[a] See key messages for the Protocol in the Communication Strategy (ECE/MP.PP/2011/2/Add.2) and in the preamble of the Protocol.

6. We see it as our mission:

(a) To work towards full implementation of the Protocol on PRTRs by each Party to the Protocol;

(b) To raise the impact of the Protocol by increasing the number of Parties within the ECE region and by encouraging States outside the region to accede to the Protocol or to apply its principles and provisions;

(c) To keep the principles and provisions of the Protocol under continuous review and, as appropriate, consider further development of the Protocol to ensure that it continues to serve as an adequate instrument to achieve its objectives.

III. Focal areas and goals

7. Focal areas include a set of indicators and targets that will enable the Protocol's Meeting of the Parties and its Working Group of the Parties to assess progress in the implementing the strategic plan.

Focal area I: Implementation of the Protocol by each Party

8. To achieve implementation of the Protocol by each Party, Parties, supported by the Protocol bodies, will implement the following objectives:

(a) Data is collected through integrated and preferably electronic reporting tool(s) and is made available through an electronic database, thereby facilitating the use of this data for multiple purposes and the sharing of information according to shared environmental information system (SEIS) principles to be developed throughout the ECE region;[b]

(b) Calculation methodologies for the preparation of data for PRTR reporting, which could be easily adapted and used in all countries, are collected and widely disseminated;

(c) Improve access to information in the PRTR electronic database(s) through a free, dedicated, user-friendly website with links to other websites and databases on subject matters relating to environmental protection;

(d) Ensure that grounds for confidentiality are applied strictly in accordance with article 12 of the Protocol and that, where applied, they can be justified;

(e) Data is made available using geographical information systems (GIS);

(f) Information on releases from diffuse sources is made available, where possible.

Focal area II: Lifting barriers to ratification and expansion beyond the ECE region

9. In order to lift barriers to ratification of the Protocol and to expand the Protocol's reach beyond the ECE region, Parties, supported by the Protocol bodies, agree it is desirable to work towards implementing the following objectives:

[b] As decided by ministers at the Seventh "Environment for Europe" Ministerial Conference (Astana, 21–23 September 2011) (ECE/ASTANA.CONF/2011/2/Add.1, para. 14). The document is available from http://www.unece.org/env/efe/astana/welcome.html

(a) To examine challenges faced by ECE States on their way to ratification through international cooperation, including translation of relevant guidance material;

(b) To promote and facilitate accession by non-ECE States through international cooperation;

(c) To promote synergies with international organizations through, e.g., the International PRTR Coordinating Group;[c]

(d) To promote synergies with ECE and global MEAs.

Focal area III: Development of the Protocol

10. To achieve development of the Protocol, Parties, supported by the Protocol bodies, will endeavour to implement the following objectives:

(a) In line with the Protocol's article 6, paragraph 2, and using experience gained from the development of national PRTRs and the implementation of the Protocol, as well as taking into account relevant international processes, identify areas for possible future improvements in annexes I and II to the Protocol;

(b) Inclusion of specific requirements for releases of pollutants from diffuse sources where and when necessary (art. 7, para. 7);

(c) Considering the inclusion of other aspects, such as information on energy and water consumption, on-site transfers of waste or storage (art. 6, para. 2);

(d) Use of the Protocol on PRTRs as a tool for assessing the development of a green economy in the context of sustainable development.

IV. Roles and responsibilities

11. Parties should play a proactive role in promoting and facilitating the implementation of the strategic plan in their countries and in multilateral processes under the Protocol and, where opportunities arise, the Convention. They should assess and regularly follow up on the plan's implementation at all levels of governance. Parties should include all relevant public authorities at the national, regional and local levels (e.g., those responsible for environment, justice, water, agriculture, transport, industry, health, education and foreign issues). Parties should play an important role in the implementation of the Protocol through the channelling of information, coordinating and/or organizing activities, motivating important target groups and monitoring implementation.

12. Stakeholders — including members of the general public, civil society organizations, experts from the education and scientific sectors, the health sector, industry, transport and agriculture sectors, the private sector, trade and labour unions, the mass media, various national, regional and local communities and international organizations — are encouraged to play an active role by supporting implementation of the strategic plan. Civil society organizations, and in particular those promoting environmental protection, have an important role in implementation in alerting the public to its rights and in supporting Governments to understand and to act upon their obligations under the Protocol. International organizations will be invited to support implementation of the strategic plan.

13. The Protocol secretariat will facilitate the implementation of the strategic plan by servicing the Protocol's bodies, organizing regional and subregional capacity-building activities and undertaking advisory and promotional work.

[c] See http://www.unece.org/env/pp/prtr/intlcgimages/about.html

V. Framework for implementation

Focal area/strategic goal/objective	*Type of activity*	*Possible implementing partners*	*Indicators of progress/targets*
Focal area 1: Implementation of the Protocol by each Party			
Objective 1.1	Development and review of the national framework in consultation with public authorities and stakeholders	Parties and stakeholders	Number/proportion of Parties having integrated and shared electronic reporting tools and data available on electronic databases
	Regional workshops	Secretariat, Parties	
	Facilitation of access to free reporting software	Parties	
	Implementation of SEIS principles	Parties, EEA, secretariat, partner organizations[a]	
	Training, webinars and capacity-building for officials	Parties, secretariat, partner organizations	
Objective 1.2	Updating implementation guidelines	Parties, secretariat	Dedicated part on PRTR.net Number of Parties using these methodologies
	Dedicated area on PRTR.net	Parties, secretariat, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Global Resource Information Database centre in Arendal, Norway (GRID-Arendal)	
	Training, webinars and capacity building for officials	Parties, secretariat, partner organizations	
Objective 1.3	Training, webinars and capacity-building for officials	Parties, secretariat, partner organizations	Number of Parties having databases accessible through the Internet
Objective 1.4	Exchange of information	Parties, secretariat, Meeting of the Parties, Working Group of the Parties, partner organizations	Number of Parties having reported good practices on the subject
	Review of national framework	Parties and stakeholders, Compliance Committee	
Objective 1.5	Training, webinars and capacity-building for officials	Parties, secretariat, partner organizations	Number of Parties using GIS

Focal area/strategic goal/objective	*Type of activity*	*Possible implementing partners*	*Indicators of progress/targets*
Objective I.6	Review of national framework	Parties and stakeholders, Compliance Committee	Number of Parties making information on releases from diffuse sources available
	Training, webinars and capacity-building for officials	Parties, secretariat, partner organizations	
Focal area II: Lifting barriers to ratification and expansion beyond the ECE region			
Objective II.1	Translation of guidance material	Parties, secretariat, partner organizations	Number of additional ratifications since 2014
	Regional workshops	Secretariat, Parties, partner organizations	
	Training, webinars and capacity-building for officials	Parties, secretariat, partner organizations	
Objective II.2	Promotion of the Protocol beyond the ECE region at events and through bilateral and international cooperation	Secretariat, Parties, partner organizations	Number of additional ratifications beyond the ECE region since 2014
Objective II.3	Promotion of the Protocol through, e.g., the International PRTR Coordinating Group	Secretariat, Bureau, Working Group of the Parties, Parties, partner organizations, stakeholders	Effective promotion and identification of potential synergies Number of joint projects implemented
Objective II.4	Promotion of the Protocol through and joint activities with other MEAs	Secretariat, Bureau, Working Group of the Parties, Parties, partner organizations, stakeholders	Effective promotion and identification of potential synergies Number of joint meetings or projects implemented
	Meetings of the Chairs of the ECE MEAs	Secretariat, MEA Chairs	Cooperation with ECE MEAs
Focal area III Development of the Protocol			
Objective III.1	Surveys and studies	Secretariat, Meeting of the Parties, Working Group of the Parties, Parties, stakeholders, partner organizations	Decisions by the Meeting of the Parties

Focal area/strategic goal/objective	*Type of activity*	*Possible implementing partners*	*Indicators of progress/targets*
	Discussions at meetings of the Working Group of the Parties and decisions by the Meeting of the Parties	Parties, secretariat	
Objective III.2	Surveys and studies	Secretariat, Meeting of the Parties, Working Group of the Parties, Parties, stakeholders, partner organizations	Decisions by Meeting of the Parties
	Discussion at the Working Group of the Parties and decisions by the Meeting of the Parties	Parties, secretariat	
Objective III.3	Surveys and studies	Secretariat, Bureau of the Working Group of the Parties, Parties, stakeholders, partner organizations	Decisions by the Meeting of the Parties
	Discussion at the Working Group of the Parties and decisions by the Meeting of the Parties	Parties, secretariat	
Objective III.4	Input to relevant processes under ECE	Parties, secretariat, Bureau, Working Group of the Parties	Input to Committee on Environmental Policy/ "Environment for Europe" process

[a] Wherever reference is made to partner organizations, it is understood that the organizations participating in the International PRTR Coordinating Group and the Aarhus Convention's capacity-building coordination framework, as well as other relevant organizations, are expected to be involved.